



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ecological Services
Colorado Field Office
755 Parfet Street, Suite 361
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

IN REPLY REFER TO:
ES/CO: T&E/PMJM/Other
Mail Stop 65412

JUN 25 2003

Kirsta Scherff-Norris
Colorado Springs Utilities
121 South Tejon Street, 4th Floor
PO Box 1103, Mail Code 940
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80947-0940

Dear Ms. Scherff-Norris:

Based on the authority conferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) by the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), the Service reviewed your request of May 22, 2003 regarding an extension of the "Block Clearance Zone" for the federally-threatened Preble's meadow jumping mouse, *Zapus hudsonius preblei* (Preble's), within the designated portions of Monument Creek and Fountain Creek within the Colorado Springs metropolitan area in El Paso County. The Service concurs with your conclusion that extension of the existing "block clearance" zone, as depicted in the original exclusion area granted on September 18, 2000, is appropriate. A "block clearance" zone is one in which the Service has determined that the species in question is not likely to currently exist.

The Service's Interim Survey Guidelines for the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse (May 21, 1999) recommend that habitat assessments or trapping surveys be conducted in potentially suitable habitats in affected counties to assure compliance with the Act. In designating a block clearance zone, the Service eliminates the need for individuals or agencies to coordinate with the Service prior to conducting activities in habitats that otherwise would be deemed to have the potential to support Preble's. The establishment of this block clearance zone is based on the likely absence of Preble's within the area, and it appears to be little likelihood that any of the area would be of importance in any future plan to recover the species. Should Preble's be discovered within the block clearance zone it would be subject to full protection under the Act and the Service would consider modification of the zone as appropriate.

The original area designated as the exclusion zone on Monument and Fountain Creeks in September, 2000 includes Monument Creek from the crossing of Interstate 25 in the north (approximately one mile south of Cottonwood Creek) to the confluence with Fountain Creek in the south, and Fountain Creek from its confluence with Monument in the north to the Wastewater Treatment Plant (approximately one mile south of the crossing of Nevada Avenue over Fountain Creek).

The Service concurs with the exclusion zone extension based upon negative trapping surveys conducted within this area between 2001 and August 2002. These trapping results were evaluated with other trapping surveys which have not had any Preble's captures in the area.

Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), and City of Colorado Springs/Colorado Springs Utilities (City/CSU) will monitor the northern end of the clearance area in June 2003 and August 2003 (respectively). City/CSU will also monitor the northern end of the clearance area every June between 2004 and 2006, or until a regional habitat conservation plan for the area is

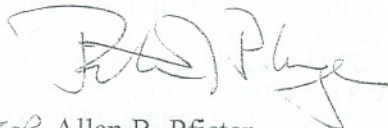
approved by the Service, whichever occurs first. If mice are found in the area, the Service will be notified and the area of exclusion will be re-evaluated.

Effective the date of this letter, the block clearance zone will be renewed for an additional 3 years. After three years the Service will review the clearance, any additional information, and may renew the clearance as deemed appropriate. Based on additional information, the clearance zone may be expanded or adjusted periodically. We will have maps of the block clearance zone available on our web site (mountain-prairie.fws.gov/preble) and at our office. We will also have the supporting data and summaries of the trapping surveys available as part of the administrative record for this project.

The Service emphasizes that while wetlands and riparian habitats within the block clearance zone do not support Preble's, they should be conserved and enhanced for other values including fish and wildlife habitat, flood control, and maintenance of water quality.

If the Service can be of further assistance, please contact Barbara Spagnuolo of my staff at (303) 275-2370.

Sincerely,



For Allan R. Pfister
Colorado Field Supervisor (Acting)

cc: Lisa Ross, City of Colorado Springs
U.S. Army COE, Pueblo, CO office
Bill Given, Western Wildlife Institute
B. McCue
A. Pfister
Spagnuolo

Reference: BJS\EIPaso\MCreekclearance.wpd